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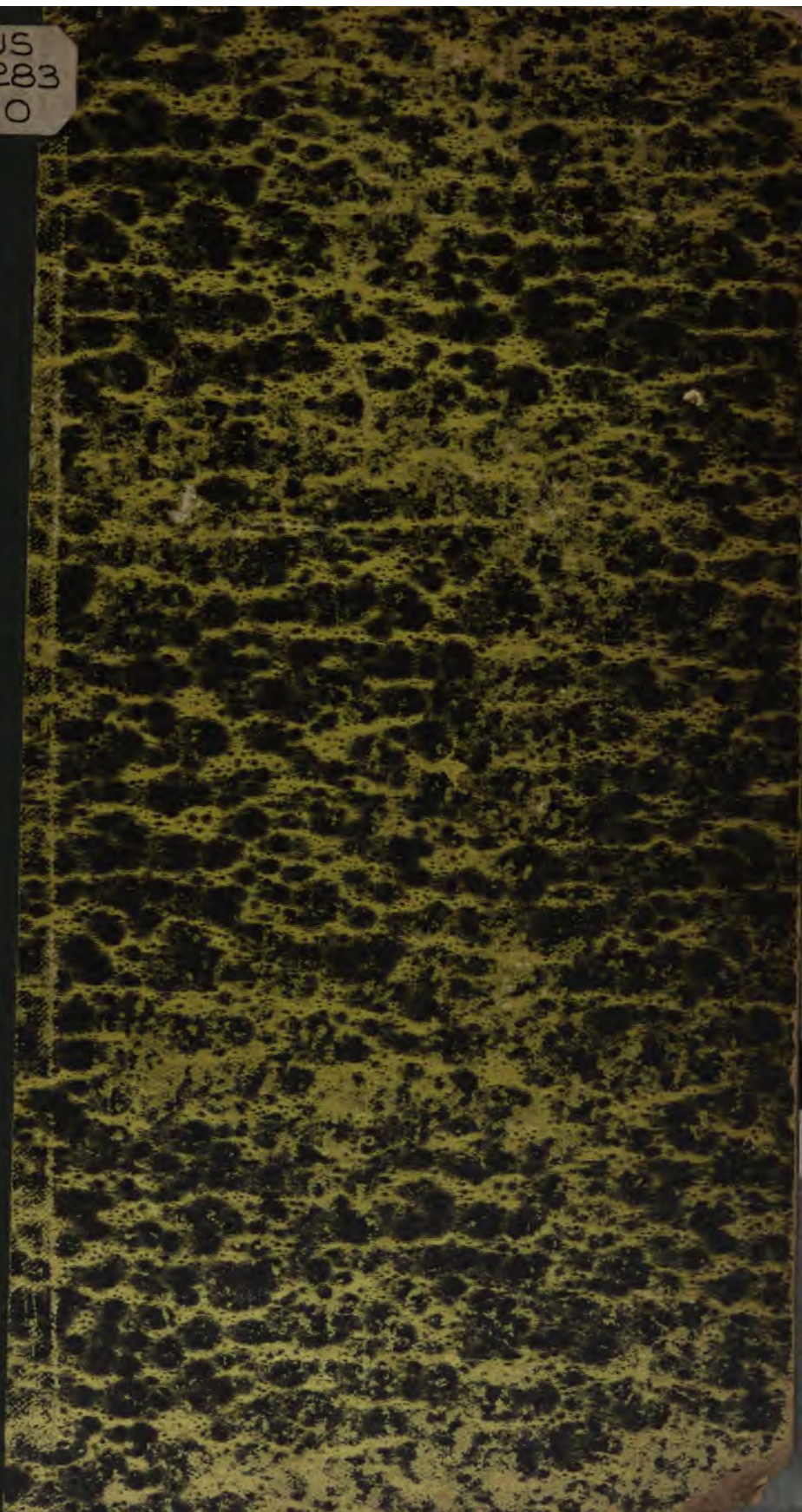
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Harvard College Library



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I McClellan and the Presidency

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~~2771~~ From M. Fillmore
20 Sept 29 " 1866

GENERAL McCLELLAN

AND

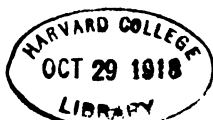
THE PRESIDENCY:

Letter from a Veteran Soldier on the Subject.

HIS OPINION OF McCLELLAN.

1864.

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Bright fund

Headquarters ——— Regiment, }
August 5th, 1864. }

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I very cheerfully comply with your request. The time has come when it is the duty of every man to do all in his power, be it much or little to direct the thoughts of our people at home to the necessity of a change, both of men and policy, if we would avert further calamity to our unhappy country! Use the enclosed as you think best.

Truly your friend,

LETTER

FROM A

Veteran Soldier on Gen'l McClellan and the Presidency.

If there are any means by which the Union can be restored, and Constitutional Government re-established, based upon the consent of the people of the whole country, we must assume that every man in the North, not only desires this, but is willing to accept the agencies likely to produce that result, whatever those agencies may be.

The advent of the Republican party into power led to a dissolution of the Union. Whether justly or unjustly on the part of the South does not alter the fact. Nearly four years of power and devastating war have demonstrated that that party cannot restore the Union. To continue the Government in its hands, is therefore, an acceptance of separation as final and irremedial.

Would the restoration of the Democratic party to power, change the result?

This is by no means certain; but it, at the same time, presents the only ground of hope. To every patriot, therefore, the question, "How can we succeed in electing a democrat to the Presidency this fall, is the gravest that could be presented for his consideration.

Two questions occur in this connection!

1st. Upon what platform should the canvass be conducted on the part of the Democracy?

2nd. What citizen should be selected as the candidate of the party?

Upon the subject of the platform, the war being the controlling question, it is the only one necessary to consider. I hold that neither an unconditional war, or peace policy, can with wisdom, at this time, be enunciated, to be made the rule of conduct of the statesmen of the party after attaining power.

To the announcement of a peace policy, there are two objections.

1st. It would prevent inevitably a restoration of the Union.

2nd. It could not command the support of the country.

It may be stated in support of the first objection, that with the present temper of the public mind South, Peace, based upon a recognition of a Southern Confederacy, would be their first proposition. If therefore, the democratic party should announce in advance that, should it attain power, Peace would, or

could be made upon those terms, then none other would be attainable, or even considered by the Southern States.

To demonstrate the strength of the second objection, it is only necessary to state one fact. The great mass of the people of the North are committed to the war. A variety of influences combine to produce this state of public feeling. Principle, sectional prejudice, pride of success, military ardor and personal sympathy with those actively engaged in the war. There is perhaps, not a family in the country without its representative in the army. The democratic statesmen of the country moreover, are not free from blame. When the war was first perverted from its legitimate objects, had they taken an unequivocal and defiant stand, the condition of the party would have been different, and much more advantageous than it now is. To attempt to radically change at once, this condition of public feeling, without the aid of more startling events than are likely to occur between this, and the day of election, is not only unwise, but, might be suicidal. A canvass, especially when it is to be a short one, should not be commenced under such disadvantages.

The objections to the announcement of a war policy are equally insuperable. It would not only be unwise, but wrong as a question of principle. On this point, however, it is only necessary to say that, no man can now tell, let his penetration be ever so great, what will be the condition of the country on the 4th day of March, 1865. To announce, therefore, a treatment of a disease of the body politic, which is to be applied at a future time, when perhaps the disease shall have assumed new and very different symptoms would be absurd.

What then is the part of wisdom?

Conservative men of all shades of opinion on the question of the war, agree on one thing, that to save the country, or even a portion of it, and to prevent the destruction of constitutional liberty on the continent, there must be a change of rulers. All should therefore be not only willing, but, hold it as a solemn duty they owe our country and mankind, to look for this change first; content to leave to the statesmen of the incoming party to determine the course to be pursued, when the reins of government are assumed, and after a calm survey of the then condition of the country.

Mr. McDonald, the nominee of the Democratic party of Indiana for Governor, very happily expressed in defining his position, what should be the stand of the National Democracy?

He said:—"While I stand opposed to the whole civil policy of the Administration in connection with the conduct of this war, I feel from the bottom of my heart for the soldiers, the free white American volunteers. But the question has frequently been asked me, if I am in favor of a vigorous prosecution of the war? I now answer that, and say that, as this war is prosecuted, under the ideas of the Abolition minority which rules this administration, I am utterly opposed to it. I believe it is entailing upon the country an unmixed evil, and I would be false to my countrymen and country, if I did not say so.

"On the 8th of January, 1862, the Democratic party of Indiana adopted this resolution: 'That we will sustain, with all our energies, a war for the maintenance of the Constitution, and the integrity of the Union under the Constitution; and we are opposed to a war for the emancipation of the negroes, or the Subju-

tion of the Southern States.' This was the sentiment of the party at that time, and I am not aware that it has changed since. At the same time, I am for peace at the earliest moment, but peace on the terms of the restoration of the Union under the Federal Constitution, and guarantees to the several States, North and South. This great purpose I am ready to pursue by any means sanctioned by the Constitution; and in the attempt to consummate it I will not tie myself down to any man's dogmas."

How is this great purpose to be pursued? Since the war began not one word of kindness or conciliation has been addressed to the people of the South, by the party in power. It has been war, confiscation, freedom of the negro, and the destruction of private property. No assurance has been made or guarantee offered that the constitutional rights of the states would be restored or respected, even if the people in rebellion should consent to lay down their arms and return to the Union. Upon the contrary, Mr. Lincoln has recently declared the abolition of slavery to be a condition precedent to the restoration of the Union. While this declaration stands, the door of peace is closed. It is the duty, therefore, of the Chicago Convention to declare that, while the Union must be preserved in any event, it is time that efforts of conciliation should be made. To this end, the illegal proclamations of the President should be rescinded, and, provided there be evidence of a willingness on the part of the Southern people to treat for peace, based upon re-construction, with all their rights fully recognized and guaranteed, an armistice declared, and a national convention or congress of the States assembled.

Gen. G. W. Morgan, of Ohio, delegate to the Chicago Convention, has recently written an able letter on this subject, in which he says:

"There is always danger of civil war, among a free people, resulting in the overthrow of liberty; and I do not believe that *mere* force can restore peace, or preserve the Union. In my humble judgment, wisdom and patriotism alike demand an armistice; and I believe that a cessation of hostilities would result in an honorable and a happy peace.

"Say to our countrymen of the South: 'Let us reason together. Your homes are draped in mourning, and so are ours. Many of your noblest sons have perished on the field of battle, and such alas, is the case with us. We are countrymen, and we have been friends, and even now, amid the red storm of battle, we are proud of each others deeds. We honor the names of Lee, of Sidney Johnson and of Jackson; and you respect those of McClellan, of Grant and of Sedgwick. Let us talk together and call back the sacred memories of the past. Washington was yours and ours; and Franklin and Madison sat side by side in the convention, which framed the great Constitution.'

"Reason is the attribute of the gods—carnage is the festival of fiends. Then let us assemble around the council fire, and for once imitate our red brothers of the forest and smoke the calumet of peace."

The effect of this course of policy is what the ultra Secessionists of the South fear, the Memphis (Atlanta) Appeal, of July 7th, says:

The accession of a Conservative Democrat like McClellan to the Presidency, who would conduct the war upon more humane principles, who would repeal the Emancipation Proclamation, and probably make overtures to the South to re-

turn to the Union, with a guarantee of all constitutional rights, would do infinitely more to paralyze the South and build up a re-construction party in our midst—a most fatal calamity—than the combined efforts of the present party in power.

Whom should the Democratic party nominate as its candidate for the Presidency. At no time in the history of the country was personal fitness for the office more important than at the present. This importance is enhanced by the presence of a new and startling element in the canvass for the Presidency now commencing. An element, it is the part of wisdom to consider, and the consideration of which must greatly influence, if it does not control the action of the Chicago Convention.

The nominee of that Convention, should combine with statesmanship of the highest order, the power to meet, and cope with this element, that is, the army, the bane and hope in times of revolution of all governments.

Two aspects of this question are presented for consideration.

1st. The army as a body of electors.

2nd. As a consolidated physical power.

The army will poll on the day of election probably near a million of votes. The Democratic candidate must divide this vote with Mr. Lincoln or be defeated. Not that the army vote considered numerically would necessarily produce that result, although this is probable; but the known wishes and feelings of our soldiers if urged upon their families and friends at home, by means of correspondence, will exert a powerful influence over the home vote. This influence we must, if possible, share. How can the Democratic party secure for its candidate a division of this vote and influence? Not by arguments, and appeals to the intelligence and patriotism of the soldier, for this will not be allowed. Mr. Lincoln's influence over the army is the result, not of personal popularity, but, attaches to him by virtue of his being President and Ex-Officer Commander-in-Chief.

To counteract this, it must be in the power of the Democratic candidate to appeal to some feeling in the breast of the soldier equally potent. In one way only can this be done, and that is by the presentation of the name of a comrade who commands his love and sympathy, as an opposing candidate. Happily for the nation, there is a man who, loved by the army, commands also the confidence of the country. The name of Gen. McClellan need hardly be mentioned. All point to him at once. The army looks to him still as its greatest Commander. The soldiers entertain for him, love and respect, and he excites in their bosoms an enthusiasm no one not of the army can fully appreciate or comprehend. Let *his* name be presented to them as a candidate for Presidency, and it will awaken an enthusiasm, the greatness of which will awe to silence the present occupant of the White House, and to this power, greater even than his own, Mr. Lincoln will be forced to yield. The soldiers believe that this loved commander has been greatly wronged by the President and those in power, that by his removal from command thousands of loved companions have been sacrificed, the war prolonged, and they made to suffer the humiliations of constant defeat. All this, the army has heretofore borne in silence, because impotent to avenge. Give these brave and heroic men an opportunity to get even with the incompetents at Washington, and love, pride, a sense of justice, and a desire to punish, will com-

bine to make them speak as with one voice in favor of their first and most dearly loved Commander. Consider moreover, the effect upon the army of a failure of the present campaign. The cry would at once go up from every agonised heart and lip, "*Had Little Mac been here this had not been!*" Their old love for the "Little Corporal" would again burst into flame to find expression in the Ballot-Box.

A few suggestions only are necessary in considering the army as a physical power. In times of revolution, no one can tell what a day may bring forth. We are in the crisis of our fate as a nation. There are aspects of the future presented to the thoughtful mind truly appalling. Can any man with safety feel we are to form an exception in History. Will the coming Presidential election pass in peace as in the better days of the Republic. Men are losing confidence—society is becoming more or less disorganized—power reigns supreme over law. Under such circumstances, is there not, danger that in the midst of the confusion and excitement growing out of the canvass, an attempt will be made to retain, by means of the army, the present reign. It is only necessary to suggest these points, not to elaborate them, as every reflecting mind will at once comprehend their full meaning and force. The Democratic party should so act as to be prepared for any emergency. Make McClellan the candidate of the party, and we have adopted the surest means of securing tranquility, safety, and a fair ballot! The better portion of the army would stand by their old commander under all circumstances. As a body it could not be used against him. Examine its condition and organization as it now exists. Who are the men commanding its Corps, Divisions, Brigades and Regiments? Most of the high commands are intrusted to officers of the old army. Men of high integrity, conservative from principle, devoted to the constitution, loving the whole country, and free from partizan prejudice and sectional fanaticism. "Few in number, it is true, but a band of comrades united by peculiar and very binding ties." Their admiration for, and confidence in McClellan is great. His integrity, loyalty and patriotism, *they know* is as pure as their own honor.

In the first place as to the personal fitness, it may be fairly claimed that McClellan is, more than any one else, entitled to the conservative nomination.

It was less than four years ago that all the Loyal States rose up in arms, "to preserve us from the infinite evils of dismemberment." The representative men, and the mass of the intelligence of all parties subscribed to the conduct of the war upon the principles embodied in the Crittenden Resolutions. There were, it is true, here and there individuals of great sincerity who were opposed to the war; but at the time Gen'l McClellan assumed command, and nearly, if not quite, up to the time he relinquished it, there was no regular state, or extended local organization which fairly opposed itself to the continuation of hostilities, and it was deemed a great act of self-abnegation for any one holding office under the General Government to oppose its wishes in any way, or endeavor to incline it toward any policy other than that which it was pursuing. Now at this time Gen'l McClellan commanding a noble army, facing a foe which he had vanquished in two separate engagements and seven consecutive days' fight, conscious that his whole military career might be sacrificed—robbed of the honors already

won and the hopes still before it, that his spotless name might be coupled with the vilest slanders, all this if he were to utter one word in antagonism to the views of the dominant faction. At this time, and under these circumstances he wrote that brief, but most masterly letter from Harrison's Landing, in which was summed up nearly all the political and military forethought and wisdom that has been developed during the war. The result was what he might have, and as I know he did anticipate.

Now as to the exalted character of the act, it challenges comparison—it has no parallel, in the history of any other General, for Cæsar threatened, turned his legions back upon Rome, and Napoleon overthrew the imbecile Directory that would have ruined France. The actual peace men can claim no more independence of thought or action, for he wrote as a soldier writes, mourning over his country's evil destiny, and standing almost in the presence of her enemies. I do not know how this strikes others, but, I consider it one of the great acts of McClellan's life, and since it was the source, or at least the abundant tributary to all the persecutions that have since followed him, the country should confide to him the responsibility of carrying out a system of policy thus Constitutional and conservative, and pervaded by the influence of Christianity and freedom. The views of General McClellan as expressed in that celebrated letter from Harrison's Landing remain unchanged. He was careful in his West Point oration to make this understood. He said in speaking of our dead: "We have met to-day my comrades to do honor to our own dead; brothers united to us by the closest and dearest ties, who have so freely given their lives for their country in this war, so just and righteous, *so long as its purpose is to crush Rebellion and to save our nation from the infinite evils of dismemberment.*" Again, in his Lake George speech: "You add to the cogent arguments afforded by the deeds of your sons and brothers in the field the sanction and weight of your opinion in favor of the justice and vital importance of the *real cause* for which we are fighting, *and the cause which should never be perverted or lost sight of!*" He has never given his sanction to war for any other purpose, nor will he ever.

No man would more gladly see the war terminated upon terms honorable to both sections, If elected President, his great heart would embrace in its love the whole country, and he would, with earnest faith and sincerity, exhaust every means for the attainment of peace consistent with national honor and the integrity of the Union. In making this declaration, I speak that which I do know.

This is however, by no means the strongest reason for his selection on personal grounds. In an age of unexampled corruption, he has been pure, and of turbulent passions, he has been calm, and of reckless denunciations, he has preserved his dignity—and of short sighted policies, he has foreseen all—and of innumerable combinations, he has been involved in none—and of weak hearts and weaker heads, he has always been strong, resolute, and confident—and of insatiate ambition, he has sought nothing—and of ill-bred and illiterate imposters, he has been the marked type of a gentleman, and has borne away from the most refined scholar of the land, the honors of thought and eloquence—There is no National, or personal virtue of which he has not in some manner been called upon to be the champion, and there is no corresponding vice against which he has not been obliged in the course of his career to contend. When God calls upon a man to be the Pioneer in such struggles as those through which he has passed, he will surely crown him with victory at last.



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